

Foreign language reading anxiety: Exploring the experiences of EFL students at a state university in Padang, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the levels of foreign language reading anxiety among EFL students at a state university in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia, to identify the main factors contributing to this anxiety. The study included 30 participants who provided data through two questionnaires. The first questionnaire utilized the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) to assess anxiety levels, while the second questionnaire aimed to determine the primary factor behind this anxiety. The results indicated that 67% of the students experienced moderate anxiety, 20% experienced high levels, and 13% reported low anxiety. The study identified two main factors influencing foreign language reading anxiety: text features and personal factors. Text features encompassed unfamiliar vocabulary, topics, and culture, while personal factors included concerns about the effect of reading and fear of making errors. The second questionnaire revealed that unfamiliar language ranked as the most dominant factor, followed by concerns about the impact of reading, unfamiliar topics, fear of making errors, and unfamiliar culture. Recognizing that reading anxiety is a common experience among language learners is essential. However, with the proper support and guidance, students can overcome these challenges and succeed in their English language learning journey.



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1. Introduction

Early on, Saito et al. (1999) recognized that foreign language reading was a critical source of language input and a potential source of anxiety for learners. As such, reading anxiety can impede language learning progress and hinder reading comprehension (Rahmawati, 2017). Although anxiety is a widely acknowledged inhibiting factor in language classrooms (Al-Obaydi et al., 2023), previous research has predominantly focused on oral performance rather than reading activities (Cui, 2020; Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019; Özer & İşpınar Akçayoğlu, 2021; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021; Zhang, 2019). Yet, in academic settings, students often engage in reading more frequently than speaking activities (Bektaş-Çetinkaya, 2019).

Ahmad et al. (2013) proposed two comprehensive aspects of foreign language reading anxiety: personal and text feature factors. Three themes were identified under the text feature factors: unfamiliar vocabulary, topics, and culture. Within individual factors, the themes encompassed worry

about reading effects and fear of making errors. Unfamiliar vocabulary is often regarded as the primary factor contributing to anxiety, as unfamiliar words hinder comprehension and generate anxiety (Januarty & Azizah Nima, 2018). Furthermore, reading in a foreign language requires understanding the cultural context, which can increase readers' anxiety (Lestari et al., 2018). Unfamiliar topics and vocabulary can impede reading comprehension as students struggle to relate to and comprehend the text (Mikami, 2023). Additionally, the fear of making errors when reading aloud and worrying about the consequences of such mistakes can intensify anxiety (Perrodin et al., 2022).

Muhlis (2017) evaluated foreign language reading anxiety and identified its potential factors among Indonesian EFL senior high school students. The findings revealed that more than half of the students experienced reading anxiety, with most falling into the medium anxiety level and a smaller proportion experiencing high anxiety levels. Unfamiliar vocabulary emerged as the most frequent factor contributing to reading anxiety. Similarly, Saito et al. (1999) initially examined English learners studying French, Russian, and Japanese, while Ahmad et al. (2013) later focused on university students from various majors (Mass Communication, Tourism, Hotel Management, and Law) taking Basic English courses.

However, limited research has been conducted on foreign language reading anxiety levels and the dominant factors experienced by students in the English Language and Literature Department at the university level (Kamil & Fitrawati, 2022). It is often assumed that English major students are proficient in English and possess a good grasp of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Consequently, English major students are expected to be less likely to experience reading anxiety (Siregar & Narius, 2019). To explore this further, additional studies should investigate whether EFL students, particularly those within the English Language and Literature Department of a prominent state university in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia, also encounter anxiety when reading English texts.

2. Method

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach to investigate the level of reading anxiety and identify the factors contributing to such reading anxiety among EFL students at a state university in West Sumatra, Indonesia. Quantitative research employs numeric and mathematical models to analyze, collect, and interpret data (Marvasti, 2018). To achieve this, a survey design was used, as it involves distributing a questionnaire to gather numeric descriptions of trends, attitudes, or opinions within a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2014). The survey data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics, encompassing numerical and graphical techniques to present, organize, and explore the collected data (Siedlecki, 2020).

2.1 Population and Sample

The population for this research comprised 157 EFL students enrolled in the English Language and Literature Department at a state university in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia, during the 2019 academic year. To obtain the sample, the researchers employed the simple random sampling technique. This method involved selecting participants from the population so that each individual had an equal chance of being chosen (Fraenkel et al., 2022). For this study, 30 students were chosen to take part in the study.

2.2 Research Instrumentation

In this study, two adopted questionnaires were utilized to comprehensively assess the level of reading anxiety and investigate its dominant factor. The first questionnaire employed was the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), which consisted of 20-item statements specifically designed to capture various aspects of reading anxiety. Through the FLRAS, students provided self-reports on their anxiety levels regarding different facets of reading, their perceptions of reading challenges in a foreign language, and their perspectives on the complexity and difficulty of reading compared to other language skills.

The second questionnaire utilized in this study was developed based on the work of Al-Shboul et al. (2013) and aimed to investigate the dominant factor contributing to reading anxiety. This questionnaire enabled students to self-report the factors influencing their reading anxiety in a

foreign language. It consisted of 25-item statements to assess various factors associated with reading anxiety.

By employing these two questionnaires, the researchers aimed to gather comprehensive data on both the level of reading anxiety and the dominant factors contributing to foreign language reading anxiety among the participants.

2.3 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the quality of the final data, the instruments utilized in this study underwent a thorough validity check. Experts from the English Language and Literature Department reviewed and provided comments on the validity of the items included in the questionnaires, affirming their suitability for research purposes. According to Creswell (2014), reliability refers to the consistency of scores over time when the instrument is administered a second time. When consistent findings are reproduced by these procedures in the same situation on multiple occasions or replicated by another researcher, the tool is considered reliable.

The reliability coefficient's standard scale provides a categorization of the item achievement value, with values above 0.8 classified as "High," values between 0.7 and 0.8 as "Good," values between 0.6 and 0.7 as "Fair," and values below 0.6 as "Poor." In this study, the reliability test results for the first questionnaire, the FLRAS, yielded a score of 0.829, indicating high reliability. Similarly, the reliability test for the second questionnaire resulted in a score of 0.860, indicating high reliability.

2.4 Technique of Data Collection

The FLRAS and the developed questionnaire items were incorporated into Google Forms to facilitate data collection. This approach was chosen due to the logistical constraints posed by the participants' engagement in a field practice program, which made it difficult to gather everyone in one physical location. Upon completion, the questionnaires were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS Version 19.

The analysis involved determining the mean and standard deviation scores. These scores were utilized to classify the levels of reading anxiety among the participants. Additionally, the developed questionnaire aimed to identify the factors contributing to reading anxiety among EFL students at a state university in West Sumatra, Indonesia. This questionnaire was also analyzed, focusing on determining the percentage of each factor's influence on reading anxiety.

By employing these analytical approaches, a comprehensive understanding of reading anxiety levels and the factors affecting them was obtained within the context of the aforementioned EFL student population.

2.5 Technique of Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the foreign language reading anxiety experienced by students comprehensively. The primary objectives of this analysis were to collect data on the level of reading anxiety and identify the dominant factors contributing to this anxiety. Following the guidelines of Creswell (2014), the descriptive analysis employed means, standard deviations, and scores to provide valuable insights into the results.

Data from the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) was collected and thoroughly analyzed to initiate the analysis. Mean, and standard deviation calculations determined the student's reading anxiety level. Participants who scored below the mean minus the standard deviation were classified as experiencing low anxiety. In contrast, those who scored above the mean plus the standard deviation were categorized as having high anxiety. Students falling between these two scores were considered to have a medium level of anxiety. The responses were assessed using a 4-point Likert scale that included categories ranging from "strongly agree" (4) to "strongly disagree" (1).

To further delve into the analysis, the sample responses were scored accordingly, and the percentages and categorizations of the respondents for each item were calculated, where values ranging from 0.76 to 1.00 are classified as "Strongly Agree," values from 0.51 to 0.75 as "Agree," values from 0.26 to 0.50 as "Disagree," and values from 0.00 to 0.25 as "Strongly Disagree."

An essential aspect of understanding the foreign language reading anxiety experienced by students lies in the analysis of their responses. This analysis provides valuable insights into their

perspectives and attitudes toward specific statements or themes. In this context, the Total Response Rate reveals the percentage of participants actively responding to each item's statement. By examining the frequencies of the different response categories, such as Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA), the overall level of engagement and response among the respondents can be determined.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Students' Reading Anxiety Level

The primary objective of this research was to assess the level of reading anxiety among EFL students studying at a state university in West Sumatra, Indonesia. The participant's responses to the statements presented in the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) were considered to gauge the extent of their reading anxiety. The FLRAS scores range from 20 to 80, with higher scores indicating higher levels of reading anxiety. According to Wijayati et al. (2021), reading anxiety levels are categorized as low, medium, and high. As such, the student's scores ranged from a minimum of 32 points to a maximum of 68 points. The mean score was calculated as 49.37, with a standard deviation of 9.44.

Students were categorized based on their FLRAS scores to determine their anxiety levels. Those with scores lower than the mean minus the standard deviation were classified as having low anxiety. Students with scores higher than the mean and standard deviation were classified as experiencing high anxiety. Students falling between these two scores were considered to have a medium level of anxiety. Furthermore, scores below 40 indicated low anxiety, above 59 indicated high anxiety, and between 40 and 59 indicated medium anxiety.

Analyzing the FLRAS scores allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the distribution of students' reading anxiety levels. Based on the frequency distribution, it was found that most respondents (20 students, or 67%) fell into the medium level of reading anxiety. Additionally, six students (20%) experienced a high level of reading anxiety, while four (13%) reported a low level of reading anxiety. In conclusion, the majority of the students fell into medium anxiety level with a percentage of 67% (20 out of 30 respondents).

3.2 Factors of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

The dominant factor of reading anxiety was analyzed using the adapted questionnaire developed by Ahmad et al. (2013). This questionnaire comprised 25 statements organized into five themes: (1) worry about reading effects, (2) fear of making errors, (3) unfamiliar culture, (4) unfamiliar topic, and (5) unfamiliar vocabulary. The themes were ranked in order of dominance, with the most prevalent theme listed first and the least prevalent theme listed last. The categorization and ranking of these themes can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. The Percentage of the Specific Factors of Reading Anxiety

Aspects	Statement	Themes	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (A)	4 (SA)	Total Response Rate (%)	Category	Rank
Text Feature Factors	1-5	Unfamiliar vocabulary	7.34%	30.66%	32%	30%	71.17%	Agree	1
	6-9	Unfamiliar Topic	13.34%	29.16%	37.50%	20%	66.04%	Agree	3
	10-14	Unfamiliar Culture	14%	44%	37.34%	4.66%	58.17%	Agree	5
Personal Factors	15-19	Fear of Making Error	12.66%	36.66%	32.66%	18%	64%	Agree	4
	20-25	Worry about the Reading Effect	11.11%	30%	37.22%	21.67%	67.36%	Agree	2

Table 1 provides an overview of the percentage of responses related to specific factors contributing to reading anxiety. The factors were categorized into two main aspects: text feature factors and personal factors. Three main themes emerged under the text feature factors aspect: unfamiliar vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, and unfamiliar culture. The leading cause of reading anxiety was the unfamiliar vocabulary theme, with 71.17% of EFL students expressing a Total Response Rate. The second factor was the worry about the reading effect theme under the personal factors, which garnered 67.36% response as a cause of reading anxiety. The third factor causing reading anxiety was identified as the unfamiliar topic theme, with 66.04% of the Total Response Rate. The theme of fear of making errors under the personal factors ranked as the fourth factor, with 64% of the Total Response Rate. Finally, the unfamiliar culture theme under the text feature factors aspect was determined to be the last factor contributing to reading anxiety, with a total response of 58.17%.

3.3 Unfamiliar Vocabulary

Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the statistics, frequencies, and percentages of the data associated with the unfamiliar vocabulary themes.

Table 2. Percentage of Unfamiliar vocabulary

No	Item Description	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (A)	4 (SA)	Total Response Rate (%)	Category
1	Unfamiliar English words upset and worry me while reading..	3 10%	14 46.66%	9 30%	4 13.34%	61.7%	Agree
2	Translating words helps me understand English texts..	0 0%	7 23.34%	14 46.66%	9 30%	76.7%	Strongly Agree
3	A series of three unfamiliar words makes me anxious while reading in English.	3 10%	11 36.66%	9 30%	7 23.34%	66.7%	Agree
4	Knowing the translation of a text in English enhances my enjoyment..	0 0%	2 6.66%	7 23.34%	21 70%	90.8%	Strongly Agree
5	I dislike English texts with numerous difficult words..	5 16.66%	12 40%	9 30%	4 13.34%	60%	Agree
Total						71.17%	Agree

Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the statistics and descriptions of the responses related to the unfamiliar vocabulary theme. Five items (1–5) in the table encompass statements that revolve around unfamiliar vocabulary as a cause of reading anxiety. Item 1 highlights that 43.34% of the respondents agreed (30% agreed and 13.34% strongly agreed) that encountering unfamiliar words leads to feelings of upset and worry. This indicates that unfamiliar vocabulary significantly contributes to reading anxiety. Moving on to Item 2, 76.66% (46.66% agreed and 30% strongly agreed) agreed they needed to focus on translating words to comprehend the text. This suggests that when students cannot understand the meaning of words, they tend to experience anxiety due to difficulty comprehending the overall text.

Furthermore, 53.33% of the respondents agreed (30% agreed and 23.34% strongly agreed) with Item 3, which aligns with Ahmad et al.'s (2013) findings that unfamiliar words intensify the complexity of reading tasks and evoke anxiety. Additionally, 93.34% of the respondents (23.34% agreed and 70% strongly agreed) reported enjoying reading English texts when they know the

translation. This indicates that encountering unfamiliar words in the text triggers reading anxiety for these individuals. Finally, in line with Item 5, 43.34% of the students (30% agreed and 13.34% strongly agreed) agreed that encountering new or complex words frequently in a text acts as an obstacle that induces anxiety. The total percentage of responses with the unfamiliar vocabulary theme is 71.17%, establishing it as the predominant factor contributing to reading anxiety among the five themes analyzed.

3.4 Unfamiliar Topic

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics, frequencies, and percentages of the data concerning unfamiliar topic themes.

Table 3. Percentage of Unfamiliar Topics

No	Item Description	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (A)	4 (SA)	Total Response Rate (%)	Category
6	Enjoy English reading when understanding part of the text.	0 0%	5 16.66%	15 50%	10 33.34%	79.2%	Strongly Agree
7	Prefer familiar topics over unfamiliar ones, especially in English.	11 36.66%	13 43.34%	6 20%	0 0%	45.8%	Disagree
8	Favorite English reading: short stories with simple words and common topics.	1 3.34%	3 10%	15 50%	11 36.66%	80%	Strongly Agree
9	Anxious when reading unfamiliar topics in English.	4 13.34%	14 46.66%	9 30%	3 10%	59.2%	Agree
Total						66.04%	Agree

Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the responses related to unfamiliar topic themes. Four items (6–9) in the table contain statements concerning the impact of unfamiliar topics on reading anxiety. Regarding Item 6, a significant majority of respondents (83.34%) agreed (50% agreed and 33.34% strongly agreed) that they enjoy reading English texts when they can understand some part of the content. Item 7 reveals that 20% of the respondents prefer to avoid reading texts that discuss unfamiliar topics. In Item 8, a substantial proportion of the respondents (86.66%) agreed (50% agreed and 36.66% strongly agreed) that they prefer reading short stories because they use more straightforward language and more accessible vocabulary. Furthermore, Item 9 demonstrates that 40% of the respondents (30% agreed and 10% strongly agreed) reported experiencing anxiety when encountering unfamiliar topics. The Total Response Rate for unfamiliar topic themes is 65.87%, indicating that this theme is the primary contributing factor to reading anxiety among the five themes analyzed.

3.5 Unfamiliar Culture

Table 4 below displays the statistics, descriptions, frequencies, and percentages of the data about unfamiliar cultural themes. Table 4 provides a comprehensive overview of the statistics, descriptions, frequencies, and percentages related to the unfamiliar culture theme. This theme is explored through five items (10–14) that examine its role as a factor causing reading anxiety. The results indicate that 50% of the respondents (43.34% agreed and 6.66% strongly agreed) acknowledged Item 10, highlighting multiple meanings for a single word, leading to inaccuracies in text comprehension. Similarly, 56.68% of the respondents (53.34% agreed and 3.34% strongly agreed) agreed with Item 11, stating that understanding word meanings does not guarantee an understanding of the author's intent. In Item 12, 30% of the respondents agreed that they engage in word-by-word translation to comprehend the text. However, they encounter difficulties when related

words result in different meanings. This frustration was further emphasized by Item 13, which received agreement from 46.66% of the respondents (36.66% agreed and 10% strongly agreed), highlighting the challenges posed by related words that alter the intended meaning.

Table 4. Percentage of Unfamiliar Culture

No	Item Description	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (A)	4 (SA)	Total Response Rate (%)	Category
10	Multiple word meanings hinder my understanding of English texts.	2 6.66%	13 43.34%	13 43.34%	2 6.66%	62.5%	Agree
11	English text comprehension challenge: understanding words but not the writer's message.	2 6.66%	11 36.66%	16 53.34%	1 3.34%	63.3%	Agree
12	I translate word by word while reading English text.	6 20%	15 50%	9 30%	0 0%	52.5%	Agree
13	Frustrating when words in English are connected but have different meanings.	1 3.34%	15 50%	11 36.66%	3 10%	63.3%	Agree
14	Despite knowing every word's meaning, I struggle to understand English texts.	10 33.34%	12 40%	7 23.33%	1 3.33%	49.2%	Disagree
Total						58.17%	Agree

Furthermore, Item 14 revealed that 26.66% of the respondents (23.33% agreed and 3.33% strongly agreed) often face situations where they cannot understand English texts, despite knowing the meaning of individual words. This demonstrates the complexity of comprehension beyond word-level understanding. The total percentage of responses related to the unfamiliar culture theme is 58.17%. These findings suggest that unfamiliar cultural elements significantly contribute to reading anxiety among the respondents.

3.6 Fear of Making Error

Table 5 displays the statistical information, descriptions, frequencies, and percentages about the theme of fear of making an error. Table 5 presents a comprehensive analysis of the responses related to the fear of making errors theme. This table includes data from five items (15–19) that explore the impact of the fear of making mistakes on reading anxiety. Item 15 reveals that 36.66% of respondents (26.66% agreed and 10% strongly agreed) expressed concern about making errors while reading English texts, leading to increased anxiety. Similarly, Item 16 indicates that 66.66% of respondents (26.66% agreed and 40% strongly agreed) experience distress when they cannot comprehend the text they are reading. According to Item 17, 56.67% of respondents (46.57% agreed and 10% strongly agreed) admitted to spending excessive time searching for the meaning of every word due to a lack of confidence.

Furthermore, Item 18 highlights that 43.33% of respondents (36.67% agreed and 6.66% strongly agreed) feel anxious about pronouncing unfamiliar words, indicating a lack of confidence in their pronunciation skills. Additionally, Item 19 reveals that 50% of respondents (26.66% agreed and 23.34% strongly agreed) prefer silent reading, possibly due to a fear of making pronunciation errors. Overall, the total percentage of responses related to the fear of making errors theme is 64%. This theme is the fourth dominant factor contributing to reading anxiety among the five themes analyzed.

Table 5. Percentage of Fear of Making Error

No	Item Description	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (A)	4 (SA)	Total Response Rate (%)	Category
15	Anxious about making errors while reading English text.	4 13.34%	15 50%	8 26.66%	3 10%	58.3%	Agree
16	Upset when unable to comprehend the text.	1 3.34%	9 30%	8 26.66%	12 40%	75.8%	Agree
17	Overprepare by searching for meanings of every word if asked by the lecturer.	2 6.66%	11 36.67%	14 46.67%	3 10%	65%	Agree
18	Anxious about encountering unfamiliar word pronunciations.	6 20%	11 36.67%	11 36.67%	2 6.66%	57.5%	Agree
19	Prefer silent reading over reading aloud.	6 20%	9 30%	8 26.66%	7 23.34%	63.3%	Agree
Total						64%	Agree

3.7 Worry about the Reading Effect

Table 6 provides a comprehensive analysis of the statistics, descriptions, frequencies, and percentages of the data related to the worry about the effect of the reading theme. Table 6 presents a comprehensive analysis of the statistics, descriptions, frequencies, and percentages of the data related to the worry about the effect of the reading theme. Six items (20–25) contain statements that reflect the fear of making errors as a factor causing reading anxiety. When examining the responses, it becomes evident that 53.34% of the respondents (20% agreed and 33.34% strongly agreed) acknowledged focusing more on reading correctly rather than on understanding the text during reading aloud. This emphasis on performance often hinders their comprehension of the text. Maintaining focus is crucial for students to comprehend English texts effectively. However, Item 21 reveals that 43.34% of the respondents (33.34% agreed and 10% strongly agreed) find it challenging to understand the text while reading aloud.

On the other hand, Item 22 indicates that 70% of the respondents (43.34% agreed and 26.66% strongly agreed) understand the text better when reading it silently. Concerning word accents, Item 23 shows that 46.66% of the respondents (36.66% agreed and 10% strongly agreed) tend to focus on word accents, potentially inhibiting their reading comprehension. Additionally, 76.66% of the respondents (60% agreed and 16.66% strongly agreed) expressed feeling upset when they did not understand the text they read, as revealed by Item 24. Furthermore, Item 25 highlights that 63.34% of the respondents (30% agreed and 33.34% strongly agreed) reported losing focus and being easily disturbed due to worry about reading. These findings collectively contribute to understanding the worry about the theme of the reading effect. Overall, the Total Response Rate to the concern about the reading effect theme is 67.36%. This establishes the theme as the second dominant factor of reading anxiety among the five themes examined in the study.

Table 6. Percentage of Worry about the Reading Anxiety

No	Item Description	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (A)	4 (SA)	Total Response Rate (%)	Category
20	Reading aloud: prioritize accuracy over text comprehension.	3 10%	11 36.66%	6 20%	10 33.34%	69.2%	Agree
21	Understanding text is harder while reading aloud in class.	5 16.66%	12 40%	10 33.34%	3 10%	59.2%	Agree
22	Silent reading enjoyable due to easy comprehension.	3 10%	6 20%	13 43.34%	8 26.66%	71.7%	Agree
23	In class, prioritize word accent over understanding when reading English text.	6 20%	10 33.34%	11 36.66%	3 10%	59.2%	Agree
24	Upset when unsure about understanding English reading.	1 3.34%	6 20%	18 60%	5 16.66%	72.5%	Agree
25	When reading English text, I get disturbed easily by noises and do not remember what I have read.	2 6.66%	9 30%	9 30%	10 33.34%	75.2%	Agree
Total						67.36%	Agree

3.8 Analysis and Interpretation

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the level of reading anxiety and its dominant factors among 30 EFL students at a state university in West Sumatra, Indonesia. Most respondents reported experiencing medium-level reading anxiety, with a notable percentage reporting high-level anxiety and a smaller portion reporting low-level anxiety. These findings align with previous studies conducted by Aisyah (2017), Al Faruq (2019), and Muhlis (2017), indicating a common prevalence of reading anxiety among students in similar contexts.

Among the various factors contributing to reading anxiety, the theme of "unfamiliar vocabulary" emerged as the primary cause. Many respondents expressed anxiety when confronted with new or unfamiliar words. However, the study also revealed that understanding the meaning of words played a crucial role in alleviating anxiety (Badara et al., 2019). Respondents who agreed that knowing the translation of words enhanced their enjoyment of reading demonstrated a positive correlation between vocabulary comprehension and reduced anxiety. These findings support and corroborate the conclusions drawn by Aisyah (2017), Al Faruq (2019), Al-Shboul et al. (2013), Muhlis (2017), and Ahmad et al. (2013), highlighting the dominant role of unfamiliar vocabulary as a significant source of reading anxiety.

The second most prominent factor identified in this study was the "worry about reading effect" theme. Anxiety within this theme stems from concerns related to performance (Zhang, 2019) and the fear of negative evaluation by peers or teachers (Perrodin et al., 2022). Interestingly, many students acknowledged focusing more on reading correctly rather than understanding the text during oral reading, which contrasts with the emphasis placed on the theme of being "afraid of making errors" in previous research conducted by Ahmad et al. (2013) and Muhlis (2017). These variations in findings emphasize the contextual nature of foreign language reading anxiety, suggesting that the dominant factors may vary depending on the specific circumstances and cultural context.

The remaining themes, including "unfamiliar topics," "fear of making errors," and "unfamiliar culture," were found to contribute to reading anxiety to a lesser extent. Unfamiliar topics presented challenges and led to anxiety when students lacked familiarity and interest in the subject matter (Dang, 2022). Similarly, the unfamiliar culture factor did not immediately cause anxiety but hindered overall comprehension due to incomplete knowledge of cultural references within the text (Jin et al., 2021).

Based on the results obtained from the questionnaire about reading anxiety, the current study showed that the level of students' reading anxiety is at the medium level. This finding means that the group of students experienced reading anxiety at a moderate level. Similarly, Muhlis (2017) clarified that students' reading anxiety level is medium. It means the students feel anxious when reading activities in class. Recently, the study done by Al Faruq (2019) was consistent with the current results that students feel nervous when involved in reading activities. Linking reading anxiety to critical reading might be interpreted as a negative relationship, which means the more students feel anxious when they are involved in reading activity, the lower the reading comprehension score they will get.

In summary, the findings of this study highlight the dominance of the "unfamiliar vocabulary" and "worry about reading effect" themes as the primary factors causing reading anxiety among EFL students. These results underscore the importance of vocabulary acquisition and addressing performance-related concerns in alleviating reading anxiety (Limeranto & Subekti, 2021). Educators and curriculum designers can utilize these findings to develop targeted strategies that mitigate anxiety and promote adequate reading comprehension among globalized EFL learners (Wijaya, 2022). Additionally, the contextual nature of reading anxiety should be acknowledged, as different factors may exert varying influences depending on the specific linguistic and cultural context (Valizadeh, 2021).

4. Conclusion

The study on foreign language reading anxiety among EFL students revealed essential insights into the levels and factors contributing to this phenomenon. It is evident that each student experiences anxiety to varying degrees and is influenced by different factors. The study's first finding indicated that more than half of the sample experienced a medium level of reading anxiety. This suggests that reading anxiety is a prevalent issue among EFL students, with 67% falling into the medium anxiety level, 20% experiencing high anxiety, and only 13% reporting low anxiety levels.

The study identified two broad aspects that contribute to anxiety in reading: text features and personal factors. Under the text feature factor, themes such as unfamiliar vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, and unfamiliar culture emerged as prominent contributors to anxiety. Among these, unfamiliar vocabulary had the highest percentage (71.17% total response) and was ranked as the primary factor causing anxiety in reading. Unfamiliar topics followed closely, scoring 66.04% in total response and becoming the second factor contributing to reading anxiety. The unfamiliar culture theme obtained a 58.17% total response and was ranked as the least dominant factor among the five themes.

Within the personal factor aspect, the worry about the reading effect emerged as the primary source of reading anxiety. This theme garnered a 67.36% total response and ranked as the second dominant factor. The fear of making errors was identified as the final theme in the personal factor aspect, scoring 64% in total response and ranking as the fourth dominant factor contributing to foreign language reading anxiety.

The study concluded that EFL students at a prominent state university in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia, experience reading anxiety at a medium level. In descending order, the most dominant factors contributing to this anxiety were unfamiliar vocabulary, worry about the reading effect, unfamiliar topics, fear of making errors, and unfamiliar culture.

This study sheds light on students' challenges when reading in a foreign language and highlights the importance of addressing these factors to alleviate reading anxiety. Educators and language instructors should consider implementing strategies and interventions to help students overcome anxiety and develop confidence in their foreign language reading abilities. By creating supportive learning environments and providing targeted language instruction, students can improve their reading skills and gain proficiency in the foreign language.

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Declarations

Author contribution : Fitrawati was responsible for the entire research project. He also led the writing of the manuscript and the collaboration with the second author. Insan Kamil revised and proofread the final draft. David D. Perrodin participated in the data collection, transcription and analysis. All the authors approved the final manuscript.

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